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ABSTRACT

The lives and work of many distinguished artists support the claim that, far from being a period of decline, later life can be the high point of creativity. Evidence from both the visual and written arts would appear to challenge the research of Harvey Lehman, whose 1953 study "Age and Achievement" claimed that artists produce their best paintings while in their thirties. Lehman's analysis is fraught with two problems. First, he fails to consider the early ages at which many of the artists he studied died. Second, the process of determining which works represent an artist's best creative achievements is inherently subjective. This is particularly evident in Lehman's analysis of the careers and works of Titian and Rembrandt. When these two problems are taken together, it can be concluded that high creativity is as ordinary a part of later life as it is of any other part of life and that, in certain cases, later life seems to mark a high point of quality. The question of why the late period of life often brings forth high creativity has been the subject of much speculation; however, no definitive answer has been formulated. (Contains 23 references. Appended is a list of 44 artists along with their ages when they produced their major works and their ages at death.) (MN)

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES: NO 3

RADICAL CREATIVITY IN LATER LIFE

DR MURDO MACDONALD

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Radical Creativity in Later Life

Dr Murdo Macdonald

FOREWORD

It is human nature to take the easy way out. So many of the characteristics our society values most highly are associated with younger people ('intelligence', 'beauty', 'health', etc), that it is all too easy to assume that they have the monopoly on all that is positive, including 'creativity'. And yet as we grow older we expect to learn from life, so that ageing should strengthen abilities crucial to the creative process – understanding, objectivity, the capacity to see connections. (One of Leonardo da Vinci's four rules for creative thinking was to look for the connections between all things.) Murdo Macdonald suggests in this paper that those in later life may be able to attempt the radically new simply because they tend to be free of the material and even behavioural constraints influencing younger people. Surely those who do produce innovative work in later life are **trebly** creative; they are challenging the norm of their own earlier work, that of other contemporary artists (or whatever), and also the norm which says that the young are the most creative! Such a challenge requires a great deal of courage; it is definitely **not** taking the easy way out.

In this very thought-provoking paper, the author implies that what differentiates some critics/historians/academics from those they criticise is how far they are willing to go beyond the obvious, the immediately accessible, in search of something deeper and more challenging. Some are not, and the result is that an artist's 'best' work is often judged to be that which first brought her/him to public attention, being 'immediately striking' and fairly straightforward to describe and assess. Such work tends to have been produced relatively early in the artist's life. Dr. Macdonald argues – and produces convincing evidence to support his argument – that 'best', or most creative, can be defined as that which transcends what has gone before, both in regard to the work of others and the individual's own work. This focusses our attention on what is produced in an individual's **later** years.

This paper seeks to draw attention to what we gain as we age. It will be put to good use within the Centre, where attempts are already being made to counteract negative stereotypes of ageing through both teaching and research. (Indeed, we are in the process of developing a course specifically aimed at understanding and promoting creativity in later life.) It demonstrates the value of Leonardo's maxim, marking the creative coming together of the author's varied interests: in art history and criticism; in the psychology of creativity, and in later life.

Anne Marie Bostyn (on behalf of the Editorial Committee)

DR. MURDO MACDONALD

Dr. Murdo Macdonald is a lecturer at the Centre for Continuing Education, The University of Edinburgh. He has a background in both art and psychology, and wrote his PhD on the relations between art and science. He is editor of the twice-yearly literature and ideas magazine ***Edinburgh Review****, and is also an art critic.*

Radical Creativity in Later Life

Introduction

Creativity is an everyday part of human thinking, but it is often thought of as relating in particular to younger learners, and – by extension – considered irrelevent to older learners. In this paper I explore a few illustrations from the history of art to shed light on this misapprehension. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to remind the reader that high creativity in later life, however much that idea clashes with the negative stereotypes of older people which are prevalent in our culture, is a fact. Furthermore, it is a fact that for many creative artists later life is not simply a period of high creativity, it is the most significant period of their production as artists. As an art critic and psychologist this interests me; but in addition an approach which emphasises real creative work, as distinct from a score on a test or whatever, is, in my view, a fruitful way of undermining the prevailing stereotypes of later life, not least because such an approach lends itself to becoming part of a wider public debate.

First I will draw attention, briefly, to some of the distinguished artists whose work gives credence to the claim that later life, far from being a period of decline, can be the high point of creativity. Michelangelo made his greatest sculptures between the ages of seventy and ninety. Titian, perhaps the greatest of all the painters of the Italian Renaissance, painted his finest works when he was in his seventies and eighties. Matisse made some of his most outstanding and experimental colour works at the same age. Piet Mondrian changed the course of modern art twice, once at the age of fifty and again in his early seventies. Alice Neel painted her most memorable portraits in her sixties and seventies. Goya made his greatest series of etchings when he was in his seventies.

Unless you are an art historian (and perhaps even if you are one) you probably do not realise quite how much of the art which we tend to describe as great was made by people in later life. Nevertheless it is likely that you are familiar with some of the work I have referred to, for example Michelangelo's *Palestrina Pieta*, Matisse's *Blue Nudes*, or Goya's *Disasters of War*. But it is also likely that when it comes to relating the age of an artist to his work you are much more familiar with the fact that Vincent van Gogh died 'young', or that Egon Schiele died young. Or, to take a comparison from music, you are probably more aware of the fact that Mozart died young than that Verdi composed some of his most influential work – the operas Otello and Falstaff – when he was in his eighties. In short you probably participate in the consensus view that artistic creativity and being young are closely linked, and do not think much further about it. And yet outstanding achievement in later life is as much the rule as the exception, whether it is in the work of Claude

Lorrain, Marc Chagall, Grandma Moses, Paolo Uccello, or Georgia O'Keeffe, to mention but five more examples.

It is not difficult to find information about later life achievement in the visual arts, for example Kenneth Clark's essay *The Artist Grows Old*, published in 1972, or *The Crown of Life*, a comprehensive treatment of the subject by Hugo Munsterberg dating from 1983, or again *Style and the Aging Artist* a special journal issue edited by David Rosand and published in 1987. But these documents are, for the most part, ignored as though they had no relevance to anyone other than the most dedicated researcher. By contrast the link between youth and creativity is a connection which is surrounded by a sort of aura; it seems necessary to sustain our particular world view, a world view which finds it hard to accept the notion of creativity in later life.

But, as we know (not just thanks to Popper), it is a useful rule of thumb to start questioning ideas when one runs up against a refutation. The fact that one finds very high levels of creative achievement in artists in later life – even to the point of the last works being the best – shows that the idea that creativity is the preserve of the young is simply false.

One can underline this with a quote from the great Japanese printmaker Hokusai. At the age of seventy-five he wrote: " ... until the age of seventy, nothing I drew was worthy of notice ..." Anyone who knows Hokusai's work will find this comment amusing because of the exceptional work it seems to dismiss. And yet when we note that this self assessment was written at the time Hokusai was making what is widely regarded as one of his greatest works, namely the album *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, perhaps we can concede that he has a point.

Lehman Revisited

However, all this would seem to contradict research reported in the classic and still widely respected study, *Age and Achievement* by Harvey Lehman (1953), which was still able to attract the comment thirty-six years after its original publication: " ... recent research, even when exploiting more sophisticated statistical designs, has tended to confirm Lehman's chief findings but with minor qualifications" (Simonton, 1989).

Lehman claimed that the peak age for the production of great paintings (and indeed in other areas of endeavour) is the thirties. Some of the modifications to which Simonton refers might lead to this peak being located a bit later, but still relatively early on in career terms. How do these observations square with my suggestion that in many significant cases the peak is actually much later? In a sense there is no conflict here for Lehman himself

takes the trouble to discuss achievement in later life, and stresses that his statistical observations of groups should be in no way be used to stereotype the individidual. Predictably enough, this has turned out to be a forlorn hope on Lehman's part, for that is exactly how his research has been used. As Simonton (1989) notes: "Lehman's original research findings were often cited in support of such 'agist' doctrines as mandatory retirement". Or to put it another way they have become part of a scientistic apparatus of legitimising negative stereotypes of later life. That is a matter of considerable concern.

But what did Lehman really find? He comments (p.83), "it is impressive that *more than 25 per cent* of the very excellent paintings used in the construction of each of figures 53-56 were executed during a single five-year interval, namely from 32 to 36." The italics are Lehman's and this is indeed impressive. If one re-analyses the only data on painters Lehman provides in his book, a list described by Lehman as 'The World's Forty "Best" Oil Paintings' (as determined by citations in numerous books on art), one finds a picture broadly in agreement with Lehman's observation (see Appendix). Lehman gives the name of the painter, and the title and the location of the painting; he does not give an estimated age for the painter when the painting was made. My own estimates of the age of each painter at the time each work was made are based on the catalogues of the galleries in which they are found and other reputable texts. In the Appendix I have reproduced Lehman's list with the addition of each artist's dates, the date of the work and the age of the artist when the work was made, and at death.

Based on this data, the interested reader will find (depending on what he or she is prepared to count within the 32 to 36 age group, i.e. where a work begun but not finished within that age group is categorised) that Lehman's assertion to the effect that more than 25% of the paintings were created by artists in this age group is correct. This is a very interesting phenomenon. When one takes account of artists who died young, and therefore would not be in a position to create work later in life, one is still left with 6 artists out of 26, an impressive proportion, which tends to support Lehman. But its also impressive to note that 9 of these 26 artists created works on this list when they were over 50 years old. The artists who lived to be over fifty and whose works can be dated are Leonardo, Millet, Van Eyck(?), Gainsborough, Hobbema, Rembrandt, Constable, Bellini, Titian, Botticelli, Turner, Corot, Michelangelo, Velasquez, Hals, Hooch, Reynolds, Veronese. That is to say 17 or 18 artists depending on whether or not Van Eyck, whose dates are uncertain, is included. So it can be seen that about half of those artists (the nine mentioned above) who lived to be over fifty created work included on Lehman's list of "best" paintings when they were over fifty. This observation does not reduce the interest of Lehman's observations about the creativity of artists in their thirties, but it does give these comments a context which they need. What this proportion indicates, at least with respect to Lehman's list, is that if painters reach the age of fifty they are just as likely to produce their best work after that age as before it.

This is a different way of looking at Lehman's figures that changes perception of who is and who is not likely to be creative. Consider the response to the following question asked by a 50 year old: "What are my prospects of high creativity for the rest of my life?". On the basis of Lehman's emphasis on the thirties age group one might answer: "The research shows you are past your peak, even though there are some exceptions to the rule". An answer with a negative value. By contrast in the light of my analysis the answer could be: "You are just as likely to create your best work during the rest of your life." The figures are the same and both responses are correct, statistically speaking, but one aligns with a stereotype of decline in later life, the other undermines that stereotype. So Lehman's emphasis (or the way his research is used) is open to question even if we accept his results without question.

DEFINING "BEST"

However, Lehman's research depends on establishing the age at which artists produce their best work. Another way in which his work can be questioned is in terms of how "best" is defined. This is by no means easy and Lehman himself recognises this:

> "Probably most readers will agree that in the field of art no single authority is an absolutely safe guide; that no one judge is able to make a wholly trustworthy decision as to which are the world's greatest oil paintings. Therefore, in addition to studying various separate lists of best paintings, I made a composite study of 60 different books which contain so-called 'master paintings'. This procedure utilises the collective judgements of 60 art critics and historians who have published their evaluations under their own signatures and who must, therefore, have tried conscientiously to make sound evaluations."

This seems a sensible enough procedure but by losing each critic's individual personality in the crowd, i.e. by losing thought-through judgments in number-crunching, there is a clear risk that what will emerge as an expression of 'best' will in fact be that which, given a certain level of competence, offends fewest critics, rather than that which is assessed as most significant by the one or two critics who have spent their lives studying a particular painter.

To this one can add other questions raised in criticism of Lehman soon after publication of his book by Dennis. Dennis comments:

> "It is possible that biographies, histories, and lists of best works contain systematic errors somewhat favouring a man's early work at the expense of his later products, and Lehman's findings may reflect these biases. For example, the art historian may be more likely to mention a painter's first significant contribution than he is to mention his last important piece of work. Likewise, an historian of science may be more likely to mention a young man's pioneering research which opened up a new vista than he is to describe the subsequent painstaking investigations which were necessary to develop and validate the promise of the pioneering study." (1956 p. 332).

Lehman's reply to Dennis is less than considered. With reference to the first sentence above, he says: "This statement is purely speculative. Nor do I see how the validity of this point could be proved." With reference to the last sentence (about chemists) he says:

> "I tried in my investigations only to ascertain the ages at which the most significant creative contributions were made. I did not attempt to ascertain how many years it took the contributor to sell his great idea to his colleagues. This latter task would be well-nigh impossible and certainly would require an enormous amount of labour. One man alone could hardly do it."

Note that Lehman queries Dennis's points on grounds of speculation and difficulty or amount of labour involved, rather than on grounds of wrongness. It is also interesting that Lehman ignores Dennis's comment that "the art historian may be more likely to mention a painter's first significant contribution...". This last seems an eminently reasonable observation. It is also open to investigation and such investigation can shed light on whether or not Lehman's method of selecting 'best' works is adequate.

To take an example: in the analysis already referred to (the only one about artists in which raw data is presented within the book) Lehman examines the 40 'best' oil paintings in the western world. Sensibly Lehman puts 'best' in quotes to emphasise that however many critics' opinions he is drawing on for his working definition, there are no absolutes here (nevertheless the word in quotes is still 'best'). Lehman analysed:

> "Data for 40 oil paintings each of which appeared 10 or more times in the composite list of 1,684 oil paintings [derived from books by 60 critics]. The 40 paintings were the work of 27 artists now deceased ...." (Lehman p. 75).

In a footnote Lehman explains that

> "The 60 lists were compiled by both European and by American critics.

> The dates of publication for the lists range from 1890 to 1939. When arranged alphabetically the lists start with Abbott, E.R. *The Great Painters in Relation to the European Tradition*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1927, and ends with Witt, R.C. *One Hundred Masterpieces of Painting*, New York, Fredrick A. Stokes Co, 1937."

It is illuminating to inspect this list (see, again, the Appendix). It becomes immediately obvious that large components of the definition of 'best' are 'fairly big' and 'immediately striking' (for example Franz Hals is represented by *The Laughing Cavalier* and John Constable is represented by *The Haywain*). Now there is no reason why the above characteristics should not be part of a definition of 'best', but they do angle that definition in a particular way; towards the virtuosic rather than the meditative, perhaps. For example the most cited Rembrandt is *The Sortie of the Civil Guard*, more often called *The Night Watch*, painted in 1642. Do we really want to call this Rembrandt's 'best' painting (inverted commas or no)? There is no doubt that the painting is a major technical and intellectual feat; but the key question is, does it show him at the height of his art? If it is his 'best' painting it certainly should. In my view, which is echoed by Munsterberg and Haak (see below), Rembrandt created 'greater' or 'better' work after *The Night Watch*. It could even be argued that the *Night Watch* was a flourish which helped Rembrandt to finish off his artistically less original (i.e. more directly linked in style to the work of his contemporaries) early period of public portraiture. It is big, impressive, undoubtedly a great painting, but Rembrandt's 'best'?

The 'second best' Rembrandt according to Lehman, *Christ at Emmaus* painted in 1648, does however point the way to what are in my view the 'best' Rembrandts. This is worth noting because it suggests that if one were to conceive of these two paintings as representing a key period of interest in Rembrandt's life, that period would be a looking backwards to his early portrait style in the *Night Watch*, and an indication of the emotional intensity of his later works in *Christ at Emmaus*. The fact that these two works between them encapsulate something essential about Rembrandt's art as a whole may have something to do with their citation in the books Lehman consulted. But this – though of considerable interest in its own right – is quite different from reckoning them as 'better' than the artist's other works.

This suggestion I've made that particular paintings, or groups of paintings, can be held as representative of an artist's work, in part or whole, reminds one of what a writer is trying to convey in a general history of art. That writer is trying to select works which will act as signs on a map so that the reader can pursue a coherent route. Anything which takes the reader too far off that route will tend to be excluded. What this means in practice is that the person writing, or selecting, a general work is concerned primarily with artists in relation to one another, not with artists in their own right. This is of course

a question of emphasis rather than an absolute division but the consequence of this emphasis is that the art historian writing his or her general history needs works of a particular type. And the particular type of work which is required is that which has a particular set of characteristics which can be easily talked about in a short space, or will make a visual impact quickly without commentary. The simple, impressive, perhaps decorative picture (or the work that can be read that way) will score highly here. The more psychologically challenging work may not. In this context it is interesting to note that no work by Goya (or indeed by Blake) occurs in the top 40 pictures Lehman lists. This may be an artefact of changes in taste between the early-century critics used by Lehman and the present, but perhaps there is more to it than that.

It is not my purpose here to try and figure out what Rembrandt's 'best' painting 'really' is. Opinions are going to differ on this, and so they should. In the end what is interesting is Rembrandt in his totality: the spatial virtuosity of *The Night Watch* from 1642 and the penetrating emotion of *The Jewish Bride* painted in 1667-8, both could be called 'best' in their different ways. But what is important here is to make sure that work that has a real claim to be Rembrandt's 'best' but was painted in later life, is properly considered. It is relevant to note that in the view of the eminent Rembrandt scholar, Bob Haak, *The Jewish Bride* (aka *The Bridal Couple*) is at the very pinnacle of Rembrandt's art (Haak, 1969, p.334). This is of particular interest for us here because this is one of Rembrandt's last pictures, painted during the final seven years of his career when he was aged from his late fifties on. Haak considers this period to be very significant in Rembrandt's art and describes it thus:

> "His remaining years were characterized by a strongly diminished productivity. Rembrandt had virtually ceased to etch and also made fewer drawings. But in painting he showed no decline, had indeed not yet reached his peak. His palette became richer and more subtle than ever before: warm reds, bronze, greens, ochres combined with white and deep black to form an enchanting play of colours, accentuated by the techniques he used to build up the impasto, employing both brush and palette knife. These techniques deviated vigorously from the classical conception being followed by other artists, who painted in a smooth, glossy style. At last Rembrandt's art reached its ultimate perfection in the one picture which I place at the very pinnacle of his art: *The Bridal Couple*."

It is interesting to note that Haak refers to Rembrandt's diminished productivity as concurrent with the production of his greatest painting since this is a challenge to any simple association between quantity and quality of production. Hugo Munsterberg, in his extremely useful overview of the achievements of later-life artists, *The Crown of Life*,

quotes this piece from Haak in full, although he disagrees with Haak's assessment of *The Bridal Couple*, preferring works like *The Syndics of the Cloth Guild* from the same period, of which he says:

> "Surpassing even *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Night Watch* of his earlier years, the painting gives a penetrating characterisation of the various types of men assembled and shows the painter's mastery in the use of blacks and whites against the deep reds and browns of the setting. There can be no doubt that Rembrandt, far from declining as he reached his old age, achieved a depth of expression and a beauty of colour and design greater than he had known before."

Munsterberg goes on to use phrases such as "the quality of his work reached a height never achieved in his earlier years" and "in the realm of portraiture ... his late work is unsurpassed". In the present context, what is interesting about all this is that Munsterberg and Haak have a clear critical disagreement on what Rembrandt's 'best' work is. Yet they are in total agreement that their argument about the 'best' work can only be had with respect to Rembrandt's late paintings. Anything painted before Rembrandt was in his mid-fifties is not even considered. Indeed, although it is clear that Munsterberg admires *The Night Watch*, he is specific in his assertion that it is surpassed by Rembrandt's later work.

Similarly, Titian's 'best' on the Lehman's list is *Sacred and Profane Love* (1511-17), and others listed are *The Man with the Glove* (1518-20), *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1523), and *The Tribute Money* (1511-17). They are all fine pictures but what distinguishes them within Titian's output is their pictorial accessibility; the idea that they definitely represent his high point of achievement is no more sustainable than in the case of Rembrandt. Indeed, in my view, neither in terms of emotional depth nor in terms of technical experimentation do these works even approach the achievements of Titian in his later work.

What is revealing about these late works – whether of Titian or Rembrandt – is an unusual degree of consideration of all aspects – technique, composition, subject matter. In short, the final works seem to be extraordinarily near to the intention of the artist, and more, the intention of the artist is itself pervaded by an understanding, both intuitive and explicit. That is to say they are mature works in the most positive sense of that term. They seem to shed light on the meaning of that neglected word 'wisdom'.

Take, for example, Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* in the National Gallery in London. Here Titian is depicting the crisis point in the myth which tells of the fateful and accidental meeting between the hunter Actaeon and the goddess Diana. Actaeon, out hunting one day with his hounds, chances upon Diana while she is bathing. Unable to tolerate the notion of a mortal man seeing her naked, Diana turns Actaeon into a stag and sets his own dogs on him. In this painting we see them tearing him to pieces with a little help from

Diana. Having inadvertently killed him, the dogs then wander in search of their beloved master. Titian captures the moment brilliantly, both as an illustrator of the myth and as a psychologist.

As with many Greek myths this is a fable about the complexities of human desire. It was well understood by humanist intellectuals like Titian that the turning of Actaeon into a stag is symbolic of the desire that he felt, however accidentally, for Diana. Similarly his own dogs that tear him to pieces can be considered as further, now literally unmastered, aspects of his own self. Titian fully comprehended this myth, he was not simply creating something pretty for a patron's wall.

But not only did he fully comprehend the myth, he also painted with an amazing technical originality both compositionally and with respect to application of paint. No one had done anything remotely like this at the time (and one could argue that no one has done anything like it since, cf. Beethoven's late quartets, or Bach's *Art of Fugue*). It is the work of an original mind at its most original (it can be remembered here that the word 'original' implies a clarity about fundamentals). The point is that Titian was at his peak of originality at the time he created this work, that is to say when he was in his early seventies, and this peak of creativity continued for more than ten years after this painting was made. To put it another way Titian didn't even start to reach his peak as a painter until he had lived for a long time. It is not a question of still being able to create great art late in life, in Titian's case it is a question of him being a better painter late in life: he seems to have more to say and to have less patience with conventional expectations of his work.

Once Titian gets into his eighties he begins to paint on a level of assurance which is even more staggering. He is no longer painting as a service to other people, patrons, viewers, critics or whatever; he is past all that and instead seems to be acting as a representative for the human condition. What he is doing gives meaning to the idea of transcendence: he has gone above and beyond expectation, he has exceeded the limit of artistic convention and now speaks directly. One of the great works of this period is the disturbing and insightful *Flaying of Marsyas*. It is like no other painting. It depicts another crisis point in a Greek myth, a competition won by trickery by the god Apollo over the satyr Marsyas who is flayed alive as Apollo's prize. On the surface this just seems like a tale of horrific unfairness; more profoundly it becomes a meditation on human psychology with Apollo taking the part of a self-righteous, godly consciousness, oppressing an unconscious, earthly, mortal, innocent. A struggle between mind and body if you like, or in Freudian terms between superego and id. Titian brings himself into the picture as King Midas, the human judge who favoured Marsyas over Apollo and was rewarded for his fair-mindedness and honesty, his ego-role of negotiator and judge, with donkey's ears. Titian's involvement of himself in this utterly human role simply re-emphasises his commitment to, and understanding of, the myth.

The cases of Titian and Rembrandt begin to dissolve away Lehman's conclusion that the 'best' paintings are done, in general, between the ages of 32 and 36. If we agree with Bob Haak, Rembrandt's 'best' painting would now be done at the age of 62. If we agree with Hugo Munsterberg it would be done at the age of 56. As we've seen, Munsterberg actually uses Lehman's favoured picture, *The Night Watch*, which Rembrandt painted at the age of 36, as a way of drawing attention to what he sees as the superiority of the later work. Similarly, it is easy to argue that Titian's late work (done after the age of 70) outshines those examples cited by Lehman. The works Lehman refers to were done when Titian was aged 20 - 40. So what we have here is two artists who at first sight conform closely to the typical in Lehman's view, that is to say their 'best' works show their creativity peaking in their thirties. But on a closer look this analysis does not stand up. What is left is some interesting data which indicates something, perhaps that works significant in terms of establishing the careers of the artists in question were produced when they were in their thirties. What it does not indicate is that the 'best' paintings tend to be done at that age.

It is clear, then, at least in the cases of Titian and Rembrandt, that whatever Lehman's list is picking up it is not artists' 'best' paintings in any meaningful sense. It begins to look as if the suggestion made by Dennis that, at least in so far as the general texts Lehman studied are concerned, "the art historian may be more likely to mention a painter's first significant contribution than he is to mention his last important piece of work", seems as though it might be pretty near the mark. But this comment needs fleshing out with the biographical notion that the significant paintings of younger artists may have an immediate impact, while the paintings of older artists may be more subtle, more complex, less easily accessible. One might see this in terms not so much of the rejecting the mainstream, but more in terms of not being swayed by it one way or another. A complete confidence in one's own artistic way so to speak - maturity and wisdom are two words which seem to describe this state. This analysis would certainly seem to apply to Titian whose later works were such radical departures from the art of his time that they did not become fully appreciated until three centuries after his death.

SUMMARY

In summary: first of all, even if we accept Lehman's definition of 'best' work, we find that, although creativity does seem to peak early in an artist's career, artists are as likely to produce their best work after the age of fifty as they are before it. These two comments are not in conflict, but to mention the first without the second inevitably gives a negative value to

later life activity. Secondly, if we look closely at Lehman's way of defining what is best in an artist's output, it doesn't stand up, at least in the cases of two of the most significant (and most cited) artists used by him in his analysis. A strong case can be made with regard to these two artists, Titian and Rembrandt, that their best works were made long after the works cited by Lehman – in the case of Rembrandt approximately 25 years later, and in the case of Titian approximately 40 years later. Taking both points together we can conclude that high creativity is as ordinary a part of later life as it is of any other part of life. In fact in certain cases later life seems to mark a high-point of quality.

Coda

But why can this late period of life bring forth such high creativity? In his book *Reclaimed Powers* David Gutmann (1987) makes an intriguing suggestion, namely that at this time in their lives artists can be engaged in a radical re-evaluation of themselves. He makes this claim with respect to what he sees as a convergence or crossover of gender concerns in later life. On page 80 he says: "the life-span journey of the [male] artist [is a movement] away from aggressive 'masculine' motives and settings ..." towards an art in which women are dominant. Later Gutmann takes this further to argue a reverse trend in the case of women artists (p. 152): "Whereas older male artists typically undo the hard edged line of their youthful paintings, [Georgia] O'Keefe moves the other way: from the diffuse, pulsing color of her youthful flowers to the sharp contours of mesa and arrowing road of her later years."

This is certainly interesting but as a generalisation it is open to question. Consider, for example, the work of Piet Mondrian, which moves from soft landscape to hard-edged abstraction, a reversal of the pattern which would be expected by Gutmann. But by questioning this generalisation one should not lose sight of what one might identify as an underlying, wider, hypothesis to which Gutmann draws attention, namely that later life is a period of real personal growth. Within the context of this broader hypothesis, one may be able to recognise the gender convergence and crossover to which Gutmann refers as significant in the works of certain artists rather than as typical.

The insight that there are patterns of experience, reflected in art, related to later life has, as I have mentioned, been shared by a number of art historians this century; it is therefore interesting to note that Gutmann seems to have arrived at his ideas independently, from his perspective as a social anthropologist, providing a new source of illumination so to speak. The interdisciplinary boundaries have, however, been well breached in the psychological literature by Arnheim (1978) and Cohen-Shalev (1989). The latter in particular shows detailed knowledge of both the psychological and the art-historical literature, and

his forthright assertion of the value of later-life art is very much in accord with the message of the present paper.

Gutmann's interest in artists working in later life is shown in comments like: 'Consider, for example, the life work of Edward Hopper (1882-1967), a contemporary master of some importance, who painted continuously – again without any loss of his powers – from his youth until his death in the ninth decade.' (p78). This is typical of the positive view of the ageing process which Gutmann takes throughout his book. And yet the central phrase, 'again, without any loss of his powers', requires a closer look. It shows that Gutmann is concerned primarily with artists whose creativity can be seen as having a kind of fixed level throughout the life span, i.e. show no 'loss'. This is, of course an important point to make as a precaution to ensure that the later-life period of these artists' production is taken seriously, a defence against the 'common-sense' idea that there is a loss of powers in all areas in later life, a critique of which has been the focus of this paper.

But in order to explore the pattern of art produced in later life let us remove this defensive position because it works both ways: that is to say that by noting that there is no loss in powers, attention is focused on the possibility of such loss, and consequently the possibility of an increase in creativity in later life is obscured. In fact, as we have seen, many artists produce work which has a real claim to be considered their most significant, late in life.

In this light an intriguing prospect opens before us, namely that an underlying characteristic of the productions of artists in later life is a radicalisation of thought; a re-appraisal of assumptions, roughly-speaking the opposite of the stereotype of the person in later life as cognitively-rigid and intellectually routinised which is so entrenched in Western attitudes. This change, this flexibility, might then be seen as underlying the gender convergent and cross-over observations made by Gutmann: for to reconsider one's own gender condition is nothing if not radical in a personal sense.

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Appendix

Lehman's list with the addition of the date of the work, the age of the artist at death, and the birth and death dates of the artist. Artist's name and work name appear in bold.

Age 51-55 (died aged 67). **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519): **Mona Lisa** (1503-1507); Louvre, Paris. 22 citations.

Age 43 (died aged 61). **Jean Francois Millet** (1814-1875): **The Gleaners** (1857); Louvre, Paris, 20 citations.

Age 43-45 (died aged 67). **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519): **The Last Supper** (1495-1497), St Maria Delle Grazie, Milan. 18 citations.

Age 35? - 42? (died aged 51?). **Van Eyck** (1390??-1441): **The Ghent Altarpiece** (1425-1432), Cathedral, Ghent. 17 citations. (Lehman marks this work as date unknown so it does not form part of his analysis).

Age 58 (died aged 61). **Gainsborough** (1727-1788): **Mrs Siddons** (1785), National Gallery, London . 17 citations.

Age 51 (died aged 71). **Hobbema** (1638-1709): **The Avenue** (1689), National Gallery, London. 17 citations.

Age 31 (died aged 37). **Raphael** (1483-1520): **The Sistine Madonna** (1514), Royal Gallery, Dresden. 17 citations.

Age 38 (died aged 45). **Correggio** (1489-1534): **The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine** (1527), Louvre, Paris. 17 citations.

Age 36 (died aged 63). **Rembrandt** (1606-1669): **Sortie of the Civil Guard** (1642), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 16 citations.

Age 45 (died aged 61). **Constable** (1776-1837): **The Haywain**, (1821), National Gallery, London. 15 citations.

Age 71 (died aged 86). **Bellini** (1430-1516): **Doge Leonardo Loredano** (1501), National Gallery, London. 14 citations.

Age 36-39 (died aged 42). **Van Dyck** (1599-1641): **Charles I** (1635-1638), Louvre, Paris. 14 citations..

Age 22 (died aged 37). **Raphael** (1483-1520): **Granduca Madonna** (1505), Pitti, Florence. 14 citations.

Age 27 (died aged 88). **Titian** (1488-1576): **Sacred and Profane Love** (1515), Borghese Gallery, Rome. 14 citations.

Age 33 (died aged 65). **Botticelli** (1445-1510): **Primavera** (1478), Academy, Florence. 13 citations.

Age 39 (died aged 65). **Botticelli** (1445-1510): **The Birth of Venus** (1484), Uffizi, Florence. 13 citations.

Age 32 (died aged 37). **Raphael** (1483-1520): **Madonna of the Chair** (1515), Pitti, Florence. 13 citations. (late work)

Age 64 (died aged 76). **Turner** (1775-1851): **The Fighting Temeraire** (1839), National Gallery, London. 13 citations.

Age 54 (died aged 76). **Turner** (1775-1851): **Ulysses deriding Polyphemus** (1829), National Gallery, London. 13 citations.

Age 54 (died aged 79). **Corot** (1796-1875): **Dance of the Nymphs** (1850), Louvre, Paris. 12 citations.

Age 33 (died aged 37). **Watteau** (1684-1721): **The Embarkation for Cythera** (1717), Louvre, Paris. 12 citations.

Age 50 (died aged 61). **Constable** (1776-1837): **The Cornfield** (1826), National Gallery, London. 11 citations.

Age 44? (died aged 51?). **Van Eyck** (1390?-1441): **Jan Arnolfini and his wife** (1434), National Gallery, London. 11 citations.

Age ?? **Hogarth** (??) **The Shrimp Girl** (??), National Gallery, London. 11 citations. (Lehman no date either).

Age 28 (died aged 28). **Masaccio** (1401-1428): **The Tribute Money** (1428), Brancacci Chapel, Florence. 11 citations. (Lehman indicates that he has no date for this work).

Age 66 or more (died aged 89). **Michelangelo** (1475-1564): **The Last Judgement** (after 1541), Sistine Chapel, Rome. 11 citations.

(**Murillo: The Immaculate Conception**, Louvre), Paris. 11 citations. This painting has now been identified as a copy, so it will be excluded from further consideration).

Age 24 (died aged 37). **Raphael** (1483-1520): **La Belle Jardinere** (1507), Louvre, Paris. 11 citations.

Age 35 (died aged 88). **Titian** (1488-1576): **The man with the glove** (1523), Louvre, Paris. 11 citations.

Age 57 (died aged 61). **Velasquez** (1599-1660): **Las Meninas** (1656), Prado, Madrid. 11 citations.

Age 31 (died aged 45). **Andrea del Sarto** (1486-1531): **Madonna of the Harpies** (1517), Uffizi, Florence. 10 citations.

Age 43 (died aged 65). **Botticelli** (1445-1510): **Coronation of the Virgin** (1488), Uffizi, Florence. 10 citations.

Age 49 (died aged 61). **Gainsborough** (1727-1788): **The Hon. Mrs Graham** (1776), National Gallery, Edinburgh. 10 citations.

Age 40 (died aged 82). **Hals** (1584-1666): **The Laughing Cavalier** (1624), Wallace Collection, London. 10 citations.

Age 34 (died aged 45). **Holbein** (1498-1543): **George Gieze** (1532), Museum, Berlin. 10 citations.

Age 29 (died aged 55). **Hooch** (1629-1684): **Interior** (1658), National Gallery, London. 10 citations.

Age 31- 56 +. **Leonardo**, et al (1452-1519): **The Virgin of the Rocks** (1483-1508+), National Gallery London. 10 citations. (Lehman assigns this no date.)

Age 22 (died aged 29). **Potter** (1625-1654): **The Young Bull** (1647), Mauritshuis, The Hague. 10 citations.

Age 42 (died aged 63). **Rembrandt** (1606-1669): **Christ at Emmaus** (1648), Louvre, Paris. 10 citations.

Age 65 (died aged 69). **Reynolds** (1723-1792): **The Age of Innocence** (1788), National Gallery, London. 10 citations.

Age 35 (died aged 88). **Titian** (1488-1576): **Bacchus and Ariadne** (1523), National Gallery, London. 10 citations.

Age 28 (died aged 88). **Titian** (1488-1576): **The Tribute Money** (1516), Royal Gallery, Dresden. 10 citations.

Age 36 (died aged 61). **Velasquez** (1599-1660): **Surrender at Breda** (1635), Prado, Madrid. 10 citations.

Age 35 (died aged 60). **Veronese** (1528-1588): **The Marriage at Cana** (1563), Louvre, Paris. 10 citations.

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